COMIC SHOP NEWS™

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A TOUCH OF SILVER

A Touch of Silver™ & ©1996 Jim Valentino, ARR.

Image Explores the Silver Age

For many fans, comics are a lifelong hobby; since childhood, they've enjoyed escaping into the world of comics to get away from the pressures of their everyday life. Timmy Silver is just that sort of kid—a ten-year-old boy who enjoys the exciting world of comics much more than his own problem-filled world. But the difference is that Timmy Silver is himself a comic book character, and it's his problem-filled life that many fans will be venturing into beginning in 1997.

A Touch of Silver, Jim Valentino's new series for Image Comics, focuses on a young comic reader who enjoys the four-color comics world, using it to get away from the pressures of his young life. "Set in the year 1962, it's the story of a young boy trapped in a dysfunctional life whose only escape are his books, his drawings and, most especially, his comics," writer/artist Jim Valentino said. "Timmy Silver is every kid who was picked last. Who was too short, too tall, too fat, too thin, too sensitive, too whatever to be one of the most popular kids in school. In that he may be a bit of most of us."

Is it possible that ***A Touch of Silver*** is a bit of an autobiographical book? Is there are a great deal of Jim Valentino in the character of Timmy Silver? "More than I'd care to admit, actually," Valentino said. " I was a lot like Timmy, in fact, a lot of the names are taken from childhood friends. It's just not strictly autobiographical."

The series is a logical extension of work that Valentino had done prior to his superhero work. "The idea has been percolating in my head for around a year now. I've done auto-biographical comics before and had always considered it my best and most honest work. But those stories involved the young adult. I wanted to go back further to childhood, where most of our real torment truly began.

"I believe that this is the work my whole career has been leading up to, combining elements of alternative and mainstream comics. I can honestly say that I haven't looked so forward to working on a project in years. I hope that enthusiasm comes through on the pages."

Readers expecting a comic book fantasy in which Timmy literally escapes into and interacts with the comic book heroes in every issue should be warned: this isn't a comic-book-fan version of ***Little Nemo in Slumberland***. However, comics are very important to Timmy, Valentino explains. "They provide Tim a respite from his rather unpleasant reality. They are a part of his world, although he does *not* interact with them. There are no fantasy sequences, although I'm toying with the idea of doing at least one issue with them, particularly now that we're substituting Big Bang characters for DC characters and 1963 characters for Marvel characters (to avoid trademark troubles)."

It's certainly obvious that ***A Touch of Silver*** isn't your typical Image series—but as far back as 1993, when Jim Valentino first talked to ***CSN*** about future plans for Image, he mentioned that he'd like to bring some outstanding independent creations to Image, to expand the company beyond the superhero field for which it is best known. That's still his plan. "What I see in Image's future is a more diversified line of comics than just super-heroes. I see this with Jim Lee's Homage line, with the books that are coming out of Erik Larsen's littie corner and with the books that I'm sponsoring beginning next March. With titles like ***Mage***, ***A Distant Soil***, ***Age of Heroes***, ***Soulwind***, ***Hellshock***, ***the Adventures of Aaron***, ***Heartbreakers*** and others that are coming under the "***I,***" I believe that the general perception of what an "Image book" is will be changing radically over the next year or so. I hope that ***A Touch of Silver*** plays a small role in helping to bring about that new perception of the company I helped to found."

A Touch of Silver #1, a $2.50 comic from Image, is scheduled for January release.

by CLIFF BIGGERS

Red and Green Together For Holiday Season

The folks at DC has obviously confused the holidays with wedding festivities—in mid-December they're offering something old and something new in a two part limited series that at least spotlights the holiday color scheme of red and green.

Green Lantern/Flash: Faster Friends #1 and ***Flash/Green Lantern: Faster Friends #2***, a pair of 48-page prestige-format books, feature not one but two pairs of superheroes: the Golden Age Flash and Green Lantern, Jay Garrick and Alan Scott, joined by the contemporary Flash and Green Lantern, Wally West and Kyle Rayner. What sort of adversary calls for such a high-powered team-up? Think *adversaries*, plural—because not only do they have to deal with an enemy of the original heroes, but they also have to head off an Independence Day-sized alien attack!

The story begins in ***Green Lantern/Flash***, written by Ron Frenz and illustrated by art talents Jeff Johnson, Ron Lim, Tom Grindberg, Andy Smith, Bart Sears, and Mark Pennington. The catalyst for the team-up is the escape of Alien X, an extraterrestrial whose rampage on Earth was thwarted decades ago by Garrick and Scott. For many years, the government conducted secret experiments on the alien—and now he's loose, and it looks like he may hold the Golden Age Flash and Green Lanterns responsible for his imprisonment. That's where the new Flash and Green Lantern come in: they want to protect their Golden Age counterparts. What they learn, though, may make their protection futile... because it looks like the entire planet may be threatened with destruction!

The story continues in ***Flash/Green Lantern***, written by Mark Waid and Brian Augustyn and illustrated by Val Semeiks and Chip Wallace. Even though the superpowered quartet is able to stop Alien X, they didn't shut him down before he sent a signal to an alien armada—and now there's an invasion force on the way to Earth. It's up to the first and third-generation Flashes and Green Lanterns to work together to save the planet... but it's not easy for the newcomers to deal with partners old enough to be their grandparents!

Green Lantern/Flash: Faster Friends #1, is scheduled for December 11th release; ***Flash/Green Lantern: Faster Friends #2***, the final part of the story, follows on December 18th. Dave Johnson supplies the cover art for both $4.95 books.

by WAYNE LEE

Crusade Launches Sneak Attack

Like to be "in the know" about upcoming comic books? Most fans do—as the folks at Crusade Comics are well aware. That's why they're supplementing several of their upcoming Crusade titles with original stories highlighting new projects scheduled to debut in 1997.

"We wanted to find a way to let fans and retailers preview some of our projects for the first half of 1997," Crusade publisher William Tucci said. "We decided that giving people an extra added value was the best way to get people excited and give them more for their money."

These special preview projects, referred to as Sneak Attack Editions by the folks at Crusade, tag preview pages onto established Crusade titles as flip books. Each Sneak Attack Edition features an original cover showcasing a specific preview, as well as a five to seven page short story. None of these stories will be included in the regular titles when they appear, making these tales true first appearances.

"This is a great way to introduce new readers to our characters, new and old," Tucci said. "They will be able to see that the quality that they have come to expect from Crusade is continuing as we expand... We wanted to give the fans something extra that they couldn't get anywhere else. We could have raised the cover price to reflect the extra story, but instead we chose to cut out some of the editorial content and most of the ads. I hope the fans become as excited about our future projects as we are."

Crusade's Sneak Attack Editions include: ***Atomik ANGELS #4***, which features a preview of ***Manga Shi 2000*** by Dan Mishkin, Jason Grfalas, and Rich Perrotta *(November)*; ***Shi/Daredevil: Honor Thy Mother***, which features a preview of ***TCB*** by Gary Cohn and Jamal Igle; Shi *(December)*; ***Rekishi #1***, which features a preview of ***Shi: East Wind Rain*** by William Tucci, Gary Cohn, and Marc Sasso *(January)*; ***Shi: Way of the Warrior #12***, featuring a preview of ***Angel Fire*** by William Tucci, Dan Mishkin, and Robert Flores *(February)*; ***Manga Shi 2000 #1***, featuring a preview of Shi: Heaven and Earth by Bill Tucci and Peter Gutierrez *(February)*; and ***Shi: Heaven & Earth #1***, featuring a preview of ***Tomoe*** by Tony Bedard and JG Jones (March).

"I owe the fans and retailers everything," Tucci said. They supported me in the beginning and our base of loyalty just kept growing and growing..." This Sneak Attack program, along with a renewed commitment to on-time shipping, is Tucci's way of saying thanks to all those fans.

by ALEX KIRKLAND

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COMIC SHOP NEWS

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QUICKSHOTS

PunX Deserve a Break Today

Feeling the urge for a Big Max and Shake? No, we're not talking about a trip to the arches here—although you might cross paths with an arch-villain or two when you enjoy this Big Max and Shake. We're talking about All-American Big Max, the super simian, and his sidekick Shake, the stars of the ***PunX Special*** from Acclaim. In this special one-shot written by *Dan Slott* and illustrated by *James Fry* and *Andrew Pepoy*, Big Max and Shake confront the combined menace of Knock-Knock and the Mime—and yes, they're as zany a team as they sound like. Don't take our word for it, though: check it out for yourself in January with the release of ***PunX Special***, a $2.50 comic intended for all readers with an active sense of humor and a taste for the irreverent.

TM&©1995 Acclaim Comics

It's a Small World After All

Where would you rather be: Apokolips, the home of Darkseid, or New Genesis, the home of the Highfather? Well guess what—they're the same place! That's right: in the aftermath of a scheme put into motion by none other than Highfather himself, the two worlds have been brought together into one. Of course, this isn't at all what Highfather had hoped for—but since he's the one who brought this dire merger about, he feels responsible for setting things to right. That's why he's calling on his son, Orion, and the living aviator of the Source, Takion, to help him challenge Darkseid.

The "war of the worlds" kicks off the new ***Jack Kirby's Fourth World*** series; this title, which replaces ***The New Gods***, is written and illustrated by *John Byrne*. As was the case with ***New Gods***, *Walt Simonson* supplies the cover art for each issue. As the name change indicates, the book will feature all the Jack Kirby Fourth World characters in one enormous tale. "***Jack Kirby's Fourth World*** is the ultimate tribute to a staggering talent," DC Comics said, "and a labor of love for all concerned—straight from the Source!" ***Jack Kirby's Fourth World #1***, a $1.95 comic, is scheduled for January 8th release.

CONsider

Warren Ellis reports that ***Six Steel Hearts***, the series he was producing for Caliber with artist *John Cassaday*, has been taken off the schedule; Ellis explains that Cassaday is proving so popular as an artist that it was difficult to work the book in his schedule without forcing him to give up something else, so Ellis felt that postponing the series was the best thing to do for all concerned... Alas, *Mark Waid* has confirmed that he and *Brian Augustyn* are taking a year off ***The Flash***. "I've been with the book for almost seventy consecutive issues, Brian for over a hundred, and frankly, we plan to do at least that many more," Waid said, but he felt like a break was needed for them to recharge. Look for them to begin their twelve issue hiatus with ***Flash #150***; in the interim, they have selected *Grant Morrison* and *Mark Millar* as the writing team for the one-year interim period... It looks very possible that the Milestone/DC partnership may be coming to an end in the spring of '97; sources at Milestone say that it's not a certainty, though... Now that Fox-TV's ***Millennium*** has been given a go for the whole season at Fox, interest in a ***Millennium*** comic book is really picking up, with two companies vying for the rights... In case you haven't heard, the theatrical release dates for the three revamped ***Star Wars*** films are as follows: ***A New Hope*** - January 31st; ***The Empire Strikes Back*** - February 21st; ***Return of the Jedi*** - March 7th... Dark Horse has plans to reprint in comic book form some of the company's most popular series from their first ten years, beginning with ***Aliens Versus Predator***, which kicks off its six issue run in February... In March, Dark Horse releases its first ***Star Wars*** illustrated novel, ***Dark Forces—Soldier for the Empire***, a 128-page graphic story album written by *William C. Dietz* and illustrated with twenty-five full-page paintings by *Dean Williams*... Crusade Comics has announced a new "print to order" policy effective immediately; the company will no longer significantly overprint its books. "Speculating on comics makes for an unstable marketplace, for retailers and publishers," Crusade publisher *Bill Tucci* explained... *Brian Michael Bendis* reports that ***Jinx*** makes the move from Caliber Press to Image's new black and white line beginning in June of '97... DC has announced that Batman: Masques, the Mike Grell Batman one-shot originally scheduled for January release, has been postponed; DC will reschedule it for a later date... And speaking of rescheduling, Vertigo's ***Sandman Bookends*** have been pushed back to February release... *Clayburn Moore*, president of Moore Creations, has announced that his company will offer a series of action figures featuring Chaos! Comics characters beginning in the fall of '97; ***Lady Death*** will be one of the four characters who will be featured in the first release... *Mike Voeburg* introduces a new character, ***Lori Lovecraft***, in a Caliber one-shot slated for February release; the book focuses on a Hollywood starlet and her misadventures in the world of low-budget films... *Bernie Wrightson's* ***Batman/Aliens*** crossover book, first mentioned over a year ago, is finally on the schedule at Dark Horse; the $4.95 first installment of the two-issue series is scheduled for March 7th release. *Ron Marz* is writing the series, while *Matt Hollingsworth* supplies the colors... ***Kabuki: Sin Deep, Act 3***, which features a cover by *Alex Ross* and a cover by *David Mack* that form a montage when placed side-by-side, will feature a tribute to the late *Mike Parobeck*. A portion of the proceeds from this issue will be donated in Parobeck's honor to ***Voices In Action***, a charitable group that works to prevent the sexual abuse of children... We've already told you that Batman will meet Image's WildCATs in '97, but he's also about to cross paths with DC's Wildcat in February in a three-part miniseries, ***Batman/Wildcat***, written by *Beau Smith* and *Chuck Dixon* and illustrated by *Sergio Cariello*, *Art Thibert*, and *Danny Miki*... *Oscar Jimenez* will supply the art for ***JLA #s 8*** and ***9*** while regular ***JLA*** illustrator *Howard Porter* works on the ***JLA/WildCATs*** mega-crossover title tentatively scheduled for '97 release... Is the late SF master *Robert A. Heinlein* about to get his big comics break? It looks possible, now that *Paul Verhoeven* is bringing Heinlein's ***Starship Troopers*** to the big screen next summer. Not only is a comic adaptation of that film in negotiations, but publishers have expressed an interest in ***Glory Road***, ***Farnham's Freehold***, and ***Stranger In a Strange Land***.

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I'm A Loser...

History is filled with stories of people who overcame tremendous obstacles to achieve success in their chosen fields. But what about those special individuals who went the other way—you know, the people whose greatest claims to fame were those stupid ideas that everyone talks about, those tremendous flops that earn a unique place of shame in the annals of the great and famous? Well, there's a book for them, too—and it's called, appropriately enough, ***The Big Book of Losers***. This 192-page volume, the ninth volume in Paradox Press's acclaimed ***Big Books series***, focuses on people responsible for such things as New Coke, the women's urinal, the Edsel, and ***Carrie, The Musical***. It also reminds us that some of the more famous people in history, including Captain Kidd and Milli Vanilli, were known for their failures, not their successes. *Paul Kirchner*, *Nancy A. Collins*, and *Irwin Chusid* bring together these tales of astounding failure; they're joined by the usual Big Books assortment of top art talent, including *Bryan Talbot*, *Sergio Aragones*, *Marie Severin*, *Rick Geary*, *Peter Kuper*, and oodles more. ***The Big Book of Losers***, a $14.95 book, is scheduled for January 3rd release.

Cheryl Blossoms In Her Own Series

It hasn't been that long ago that Archie's long-standing romantic triangle was shaken up by the surprise reappearance of Cheryl Blossom, an appealing (and shapely) figure from his past. Since her return, she has become one of the most popular characters in Riverdale... which is why the folks at Archie are giving her her own book beginning in '97. ***Cheryl Blossom #1***, the first issue of the ongoing series, begins with Cheryl and her brother inherit an old country club from an eccentric aunt. The Blossoms see this as their chance to break into the upper reaches of society... but those plans may go awry when Archie and the gang show up. *Dan Parent* and *Dan DeCarlo* reveal what happens next in ***Cheryl Blossom #1***, a $1.50 January release from Archie Comics.

QUICKSHOTS

Bettie's In Something Silke

Sexy women. Malay pirates. Time Travel. Jungle adventure. Sound like enough stuff to fill a whole line of adventure comics? Think again! All of this, and much more, can be found in ***Bettie Page Comics: Spicy Adventure***, a rollicking mature readers adventure (and the only fully licensed *Bettie Page* comic series) by good-girl artist *Jim Silke*, acclaimed for his pulpish adventure series ***Rascals In Paradise.*** The story begins in 1951, where Bettie is kidnapped and thrust into the future; from there, the adventure gets wilder and wilder. "I've been drawing Bettie since 1961," Silke said, and still trying to get her right. So this time I transported her to the 25th Century and landed her on a jungle planet where, naturally, Malay pirates, white slavers, bandits, warlords, and nearly everyone else is out to get her. Why? Because she's Bettie...!" Enjoy the sexy adventure on January 16th, when ***Bettie Page Comics: Spicy Adventure***, a $2.95 book, is scheduled for release.

Ash Feeds the Fire

Obviously, Ash remains hotter than anyone dreamed. The first trade paperback collection, which assembled ***Ash #s 1-5*** in a single volume, went out of print almost immediately upon release. Since then, Event Comics has heard from oodles of fans who wanted to know how they could get a copy of this collection that included some special original features in addition to the reprint material. Event has heard you, which is why they're bringing ***Ash Volume One*** back into print in January. The second printing of this 128-page book, priced at $14.95, is tentatively scheduled for release at the same time as ***Ash Volume Two***, a second 128-page volume collecting ***Ash #6, Ash #0***, and ***Ash: The Fire Within #s 1-3***, th book also features an introduction by *Mark Waid* and a new cover by *Joe Quesada* and *Jimmy Palmiotti*. Pick 'em both up, and you have all ten appearances of ***Ash***, along with some bonus material that you won't find anywhere else.

FANS ENTHUSIASTICALLY AGREE... THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT!!!

"...A refreshing change from the current trend of superhero books. The Troublemakers are likable people with powers, instead of being mass-produced clones of everything that has come before... Finally, a monthly comic that will appeal to everyone, young & old, male & female, new reader or long-time collector. I highly recommend it!.."
—Rich Conley & Charles Morden, Heroes & Fantasies
"...Nicieza is quite a chef! He's blended teens with science fiction and special powers, then threw in a dash of compassion to come out with a recipe for trouble. He left me wondering what 'trouble' they could get into next..."
—Beverly Crisman, Herdes Comics
"...Kenny Martinez is going to be a hot artist. His Troublemakers work is very unique. Paired with Fabian's scripting, it should really be a book people can get behind..."
—Kevin Gardner, The Comic Strip
"...I felt that this was just a typical teenage super-hero book. Nothing new. Been there, done that. To my pleasure, Nicieza proved me wrong yet again..."
—Donald MacPherson (online)
"...If the company's other titles are as well done as Troublemakers, then Acclaim should be a hit..."
—Jeffrey Coburn, Manchester, NH
"...I will be buying this book. And anybody who doesn't is a fool..."
—John Prill (online)
"...Yow! The best team book since Gen 13!.."
—Murray Nuckols, Lion & Unicorn
Troublemakers™ #1
SHIPS DECEMBER 27TH
ACCLAIM COMICS
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Ryan's Hope

Life hasn't been very good to Kit Ryan. Her relationship with John Constantine has come to an end, her country is ravaged by war, and her family is split by hatred and haunted by the fear of war's violence.

But home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in, Robert Frost once wrote... and now Kit Ryan has to go home.

Heartbreakers, a 64-page Vertigo one-shot featuring characters introduced in the pages of ***Hellblazer,*** is a powerful human interest story about a family trying to come to terms with its own failures and heartbreaks while attempting to find normalcy in a country where life is anything but normal. Set in contemporary Belfast, the compelling story allows writer *Garth Ennis* to explore both interpersonal and societal conflicts as Kit Ryan is reunited with her brother and three sisters. The art for this moving tale is supplied by *Steve Dillon*, acclaimed for his ability to convey powerful emotions in a real-world setting. ***Heartbreakers,*** a $4.95 book, is scheduled for January 22nd release.

Need some help sorting through the stacks of comic books on the stands each month as you search for something worth reading? Well, let *CSN* eliminate the chaff from the wheat for you! Each month, Cliff (in plain type) and Brett *(in italic type)* sort through stacks of upcoming releases in search of those titles that deserve some extra attention. If you're looking for killer reviews of bad books, we advise that you look elsewhere; we'd rather give the column inches to books that deserve praise or extra attention instead of tying up space with reviews that skewer disappointing comics.

Publishers interested in having their books considered for review in this column should send advance xeroxes to *CSN Give & Take*, 2770 Carillon Crossing, Marietta GA 30066. We'd prefer to receive copies at least thirty days prior to the book's release.

At the end of the reviews, we also offer a one to five star rating for each title, with both Cliff's and Brett's ratings listed. Since we make a point to devote space only to books that deserve the attention, this rating offers readers a handy means to weigh the merits of each title. Here's the scale:

★	Adequate reading, worth the cover price
★★	Entertaining material that shows promise
★★★	Good stuff that's worth a close look
★★★★	Primo reading; don't pass it up
★★★★★	You don't find comics better than this; *creme de la creme*

Before the folks at Caliber kindly sent me comics of the original run of Jenni Gregory's ***Dreamwalker***, I was totally unfamiliar with the series. I'm glad that they corrected that oversight; as it turns out, ***Dreamwalker*** is a well-crafted, promising comic that had gone totally overlooked—at least by me—in its original run.

I had never heard of it, let alone read it.

Dreamwalker is, like so many books nowadays, a series that focuses on the world of dreams. However, there's a big difference; in Jenni Gregory's series, the dream motif is less important than the life of the main character, Karen. Karen has no idea how or why she

Dreamwalker #1
YEAH RIGHT.
A LIKELY STORY.
I'M TELLING YOU THE TRUTH.
I'M COMPLETELY LOST.
HMMM....
THAT SOUNDED ALMOST SINCERE.
TALENT FOR DESTRUCTION, MORE LIKE.
HE'S GOT SAND, I'LL GIVE HIM THAT.
AND MORE FIREPOWER THAN THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.
Justice Riders
TM & ©1995 DC Comics

gained the ability to enter the dreams of others; her mentor, Ms. Tobias, hasn't filled her in on all the details.

Karen's story is one of amazement and frustration, of possibilities and mundanity. That's what makes ***Dreamwalker*** work; the book is a fascinating, sometimes poignant story that juxtaposes the pains and problems of everyday life with the infinite opportunities of the dream-world. And it's not Karen's dreams we see; instead, it's the dreams of the people she interacts with, ranging from Ms. Tobias and her cat-filled world in which she enjoys the company of her husband who in reality died years before to the adventurous world of a young boy with terminal cancer. The book is packed with feelings that sometimes catch you by surprise; Gregory can switch directions in a deft way that doesn't seem jarring.

I was remarkably impressed with her sense of pacing and storytelling. The four issues of the series that we read kept me captivated in ways that I didn't expect. I kept reading the book on and on, waiting on the literary edge of my seat for what would happen next. In a world where it is very common t have the adventure overshoot the story, it is nice to see a book that lets things happen at a very natural and even tempo. We don't always need an adrenaline rush to be entertained.

Like so many independents, this book has a strong sense of pacing. Gregory isn't rushing through her story—but she's also not stretching it out interminably. You're right in your assessment that she lets things happen at a natural tempo.

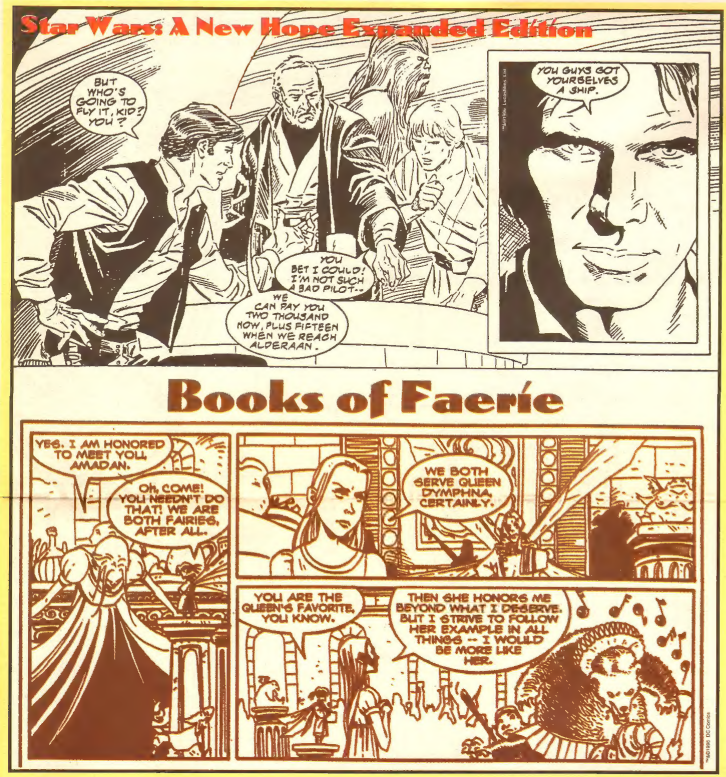
Gregory isn't quite as strong an illustrator as she is a storyteller; her work flows well visually, but she's still learning how to use line weight and backgrounds to make a piece of art work. But the art always serves to move the story forward and never hampers my enjoyment of the book.

I don't know if Caliber intends to reprint the original issues from Dreamwalker Press or start off with a new story arc; either way, I can strongly recommend this series to anyone who enjoys fantasy with a compassionate human interest angle. The characters in ***Dreamwalker*** remind me of people I know, and they respond to the situations they face like I believe real people would—and it's that verisimilitude that is Gregory's strongest asset.

Dreamwalker #1
Cliff ★★★
Brett ★★★

When I first heard the concept for this book I thought that it was going to be silly. No, that's not true: I thought that it was going to be a bad book. Well, from out of the West rides a Western of a dif-

PREVIEWS&REVIEWS


Star Wars: A New Hope Expanded Edition
BUT WHO'S GOING TO FLY IT, KID? YOU?
YOU BET I COULD! I'M NOT SUCH A BAD PILOT--
WE CAN PAY YOU TWO THOUSAND NOW, PLUS FIFTEEN WHEN WE REACH ALDERAAN.
YOU GUYS GOT YOURSELVES A SHIP.
Books of Faerie
YES. I AM HONORED TO MEET YOU, AMADAN.
OH, COME! YOU NEEDN'T DO THAT! WE ARE BOTH FAIRIES, AFTER ALL.
WE BOTH SERVE QUEEN DYMPHNA, CERTAINLY.
YOU ARE THE QUEEN'S FAVORITE, YOU KNOW.
THEN SHE HONORS ME BEYOND WHAT I DESERVE. BUT I STRIVE TO FOLLOW HER EXAMPLE IN ALL THINGS -- I WOULD BE MORE LIKE HER.

ferent color, and it is anything but bad.

Smile when you say that, pardner...

Justice Riders *is the latest in the Elseworlds series of one shots and miniseries, giving us a glimpse into an alternate version of the heroes that we have come to know so well. This time out, as the title implies, it's the Justice League's turn, and things are looking are looking mighty fine, pardner. The thought of Wonder Woman, The Flash, Blue Beetle, Guy Gardner, John Jones and others in the old west just sounds wrong, but it reads very right.*

What makes it read right, in large part, is that it's not just Western versions of superheroes, but is instead these people set in a Western setting, with the superhero angle downplayed.

Chuck Dixon is the writing architect of this tale, and he manages to keep the flavor of the characters that we know, and add that touch of the classic western to make it different—and fun. While reading this book, I thought that Clint Eastwood might pop out of the woodwork at any moment, only with some super powers. In many ways, he does, as Dixon creates personaes for the Justice League that are remarkably similar to that of Eastwood in his prime.

The main character in the story is Diana Prince, a Marshall for the city of Paradise. When her city is mysteriously destroyed, she goes out on a mission of vengeance, and to help her out she gathers some of the best lawmen in the West—and some others that work around the law. The enemy is a mystery that I don't want to spoil, but I will tell you that several characters make spectacular entrances in the book on either side.

It's sort of like a Western who's who: you want to figure out how many more Western renditions of DC heroes they can fit in here. The Hawkman interpretation was perhaps my favorite.

Part of the fun of reading this book was attempting to figure out which side the characters were on as they first make their appearance. Heck, it's fun just trying to identify the characters before their names are given.

Part of that fun is due to the artwork by J.H. Williams III and Mike Gray. This team creates a very evocative style that keeps you looking in the background for clues and information. Not that this is the highly detailed style of a Geoff Darrow, but more of a well crafted work, where everything seems in place.

While it may not be a Geoff Darrow sort of ultradetailed book, I still feel like I have to say some words of praise about the fine-line work and meticulous detail that the art team manage to pack in here.

Williams has also designed some great Old-West version of the classic Justice League costumes, adding to the timeless quality of some of these designs.

Justice Riders *was the biggest surprise in this month's stack of titles. I don't really like westerns. I didn't think that I would like this comic. I was wrong.* ***Justice Riders*** *is another fabulous addition to the growing ranks of Elseworlds books, and something that I would recommend to anyone.*

Justice Riders
Cliff ★★★
Brett ★★★★

What is there to say about Dark Horse's totally revamped adaptation of ***Star Wars: A New Hope?*** Well, there are no big surprises storywise; there are some new scenes, and the adaptation is closer to the feel of the original series than the old adaptation was, but there's no shocking revelation in this storyline.

Except that they leave out a few scenes, and cut some others short...

That's true of any adaptation, though; I still think this one is more true to the storyline than the original adaptation was.

But oh, the artwork!

The artwork on the old adaptation of ***Star Wars: A New Hope*** certainly wasn't bad... but it was merely adequate. It told the story, the characters resembled the actors, and that was it.

But this new adaptation features art by Carlos Garzon and Al Williamson, who not only capture the epic feel of the storyline more closely, but who also manage to bring more contemporary visual sensibilities to the book. Larger panels and more pages give the story that extra visual impact. And here's an added bonus—the book now has a comparable look to the Al Williamson adaptations of the second and third films!

I have to agree with you on the artwork. This is a more dynamic version of the story. I was amused to discover that oDark Horse/Lucasfilms made sure to add the new scenes from the movie—but then it wouldn't be an adaptation of the new version without them, would it?

I see that as a strong selling point, actually—particularly since the comic will be on the stands a couple of weeks before the film debuts!

And to make it even better, Dark Horse is offering you a choice of formats: you can buy this one as a four-issue limited series, or you can buy the trade paperback at almost the same time as the first issue! Convenient, n'est-ce-pas?

Star Wars: A New Hope Expanded Edition
Cliff ★★
Brett ★★

Fairies are those soft, friendly, beautiful creatures that are filled with joy and goodness, right? Ha.

Books of Faerie *is the new three issue series from Vertigo that spins out of the* ***Books of Magic*** *title. This series can stand on its own as a complete title, or it will fill in the background information on the history of Queen Titania and ultimately Timothy Hunter. Either way, this is a well crafted tale of Machiavellian deceit and treachery, also known as the inner workings of a royal court.*

The stand-alone aspect is very important; I suspect that there are many readers who haven't followed ***Books of Magic*** regularly who will want to give this one a try—and they'll actually know what's going on!

Bronwyn Carlton tells the history of Titania's rise to power, from a simple human child to the most favored of the King,a nd the current ruler of Faeriekind. She wasn't alone on that trip, and she wasn't always in control of her actions. It's fun to see the more classical version of the Faerie getting some

play in this comic, or in comics in general. The idea of a race that steals children and bickers among themselves almost like children with too much importance is a wonderful literary tool. We can see so much of mankind reflected in their actions that parody becomes commonplace. Not only that, but that much intrigue leads to wonderful stories.

The plot is complex and sophisticated enough to do justice to the Vertigo name. I find it intriguign, though, that Titania, while the main character of the story, isn't the most fascinating character; that honor goes to Amadan, a spritely figure who is crucial to the events of this story.

The art is by Peter Gross, who is no stranger to either Vertigo or ***Books of Magic****. His artwork has that almost classical clean-line style that fits with the classic image of the Faerie. His storytelling is equally solid, making him the perfect artist for this style book.*

Books of Faerie *is a great companion piece to* ***Books of Magic****, especially with all the time that Tim has spent over in that other realm. The nice quality is that you don't have to be a fan of* ***Books of Magic*** *to enjoy the story, though, just a fan of a well done book.*

Books of Faerie
Cliff ★★
Brett ★★★

The Challengers of the Unknown are back... but they're not the same Challengers who helped kick off the Silver Age almost four decades ago.

Then again, doesn't that seem pretty reasonable? After all, how many times can the same four guys challenge the unknown before it begins to take its toll on them?

In the new ***Challengers of the Unknown,*** Steven Grant, Len Kaminski, John Paul Leon, and Shawn Martinbrough introduce a new team of Challengers, a diverse group of people all connected by the fact that they have somehow survived circumstances that should have resulted in their deaths. They're living on borrowed time, and they're using that time to investigate anomalous incidents wherever they occur.

I was worried about this book. ***Challengers of the Unknown*** *is one of the few Silver Age titles that I have a near complete run on, and I've always enjoyed the book and the characters. I think that you can understand why I was upset when I found out that the characters that I remembered weren't a part of this series.*

But at the same time, you might recall how upset other Challs fans were with the Jeph Loeb-Tim Sale miniseries that did use the original Challs—albeit in a very different interpretation. It seems that creators are sometimes hogtied if they use the original characters; no one wants them to make any changes in those characters at all. So it's often much easier to update the concept and introduce new characters.

Still, I wanted to reserve judgement. I wanted to base my opinions on the book itself, and not on any pre-conceived notion. This book works. Both in terms of the characters and the story, this book works. That leaves me very happy.

The first issue of the series doesn't bog us down with a lengthy origin; instead, we meet the characters as they investigate some strange disappearances in a small town in Wyoming. The tale is pure X-Files, with the quartet facing mistrustful law enforcement agents, suspicious religious leaders, and conspiratorially paranoid townspeople as they try to get tot the truth behind the "harvestings." However, it's a very well-crafted tale that never lags... and boy, don't I wish that I could say the same about the ***X-Files*** this season!...

Hey, I've really enjoyed ***X-Files*** *this season...*

Ah, well... that's another story entirely...

There's no doubt that ***Challengers of the Unknown*** is venturing into that anomalous Forteana territory that X-Files has staked out for itself on television—but in this case, it's a natural thing, because these characters are tailor made for that sort of investigation. Check out their name, for gosh sakes; this team doesn't do bank robberies and super-villainy, they specialize in the weird!

Which is exactly why this book works. That is the concept of the book, right from the beginning, and I'm glad that it stayed that way.

And wouldn't it have been fun to see how Simon and Kirby would have handled this?

John Paul Leon may not be Jack Kirby, but it's fair to say that he is outdoing himself with his pencilling here; the book is boldly illustrated and quite moody, which seems perfectly appropriate for this sort of story. Leon draws more than superhero poses; he can illustrate ordinary people with equal skill, and that's just what this book calls for.

Of all the DC "Weirdoverse" titles, I think that ***Challengers of the Unknown*** is the one with the strongest appeal to superhero fans—but I'm glad to say that it's not a superhero book. Grant and Kaminski are taking the title of this series very seriously.

What's that? Oh, yeah—don't worry, you'll find out more about what happened to the original Challengers as the series goes on...

Now ***that*** *disturbs me...*

Challengers of the Unknown #1
Cliff ★★★
Brett ★★★★

I am truly enjoying this current trend that has moved through the ***Aliens*** *books. Yes, the creatures from* ***Aliens*** *are horrific monsters that have quickly taken their place in the same realm as the Creature From the Black Lagoon in its image, but that doesn't mean that you can't have fun with it.* ***Aliens: Lovesick*** *has fun with it.*

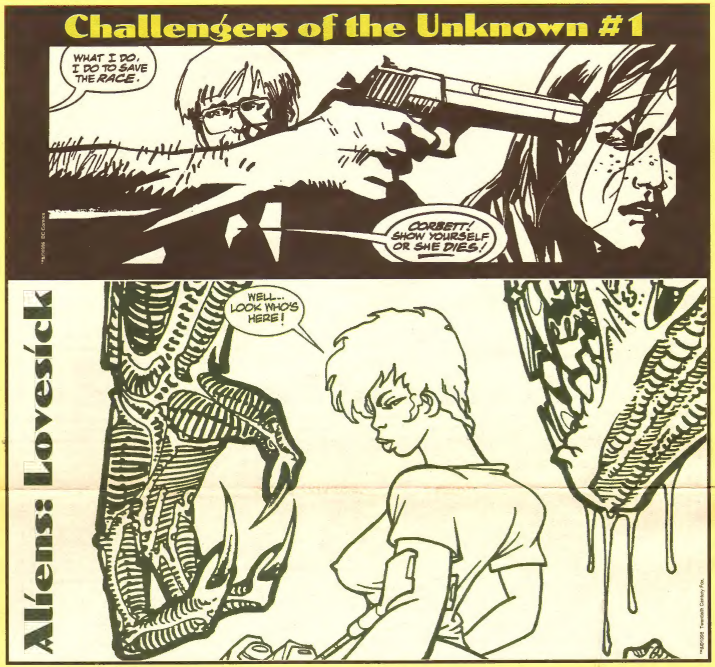
I never thought it would be possible, but you're right: this is, at its core, a lighthearted Aliens story.

In the tradition of the Herk Mondo series of stories from Dark Horse, ***Aliens: Lovesick*** *introduces the idea of dark humor into this horror comic. This one-shot by Richard Forg, Thierry Gagnon, and Randy Stradley focuses on the character of Nancy the bodyguard, her ward Jimi, and the lecherous Dr. Dakien. Naturally, the child loves her, the doctor loves her, and she just wants a good night's sleep. Well, some men don't take rejection well, and when you're an insane doctor, that means that you have the potential for big monsters hunting down female bodyguards. Which is exactly what happens. This is such a common idea that it doesn't even affect Nancy emotionally, she just does her job. There is a near-parody level to her actions and reactions in this book. She even strips down to her underwear a la Ripley from the movies at one point. There is still plenty of action in the book, but it definitely has that edge of humor to it.*

It's humor in the Lobo style, though; that is, the character refuses to respond to the Alien horror in the way that most characters in an Aliens story do, but instead accepts it as just another problem to overcome. It's that jaded attitude that makes the humor work.

The art has a slightly lampoonish look to it. This almost has the look and feel of an ***Aliens*** *animated series. The Alien looks spooky and clean-lined.*

I thought of Aliens as Geoff Darrow would draw it...


Challengers of the Unknown #1
WHAT I DO, I DO TO SAVE THE RACE.
CORBETT! SHOW YOURSELF OR SHE DIES!
Aliens: Lovesick
WELL... LOOK WHO'S HERE!

PREVIEWS&REVIEWS

I can see that, although it's not that ultradetailed. It would almost be nice to see a less light-hearted series done with a slightly more realistic version of the human characters with this exact version of the monster.

I'm a sucker for a funny story. Dark humor, light humor, any humor. ***Aliens: Lovesick*** *is definite humor, and that isn't what you expect in an* ***Aliens*** *comic—but it sure is nice to see.*

Aliens: Lovesick
Cliff ★★
Brett ★★★

Marvel's last incarnation of Conan was, for a brief moment, an incredibly promising book—and much of that promise was due to the stunning artwork of Rafael Kayanan, who gave the series its first true character since Barry Windsor-Smith left it in the 1970's.

Now Kayanan is bringing that same distinctive style to a relaunch of ***Turok***—and his stunning visual revamping of the series is matched by writer Fabian Nicieza's bold reinterpretation of who and what Turok is, as well as how and why he continues to fight dinosaurs in modern times.

Acclaim has been very bold in their relaunches of the Valiant heroes—surprisingly bold, in fact, considering how relatively short a time it's been since the original series rocketed to comics fame and then plummeted again. The decision was a good one, though; this is the fourth relaunch I've read so far, and each has managed to improve upon the original.

Nicieza recognizes the essential appeal of Turok, but he updates that man-versus-dinosaur tale and manages to introduce complex characters into a storyline whose main character had, in its last incarnation, become a bit stereotypical. In some ways, the new Turok's personality seems a bit influenced by the previous Valiant interpretation of Turok's sidekick—but by introducing a pro baseball angle into the protagonist's life, we see why he's reluctant to continue the family tradition.

Turok*, like* ***Shadowman****, was one of Valiant's titles in desperate need of a revamp. Like you said, this one improves on the original. To me, the strength of this Turok was the heritage and history that had been built behind it. I liked the idea of a bloodline that assumes the mantle of Turok, Son of Stone. Very well fleshed out in an age of superficial heroes in spandex.*

I thought that this worked well, too, because it didn't necessarily negate anything that happened before; it just put a new spin on the old tales, making them the first chapter in a Turok generational saga.

All of the Valiant relaunches have had a bolder, more dynamic look than the old Valiant series, but Kayanan's artwork is so distinctive, so dynamic that this book will appeal to art fans as well as those looking for a good read.

Turok #1
Cliff ★★★
Brett ★★★

Well, the Superman Animated Series has been on the air now for a couple of months, and it has certainly been something to behold. In case you haven't noticed, there is also a comic based on the show (that was based on a comic, but let's not get into that...) that is something to behold on its own.

Scott McCloud has taken the writing chores on ***Superman Adventures*** *to task, and proved that he is the stuff of quality. The creator of* ***Zot!*** *has brought us some new adventures of the Man of Steel that match the quality of the show perfectly. Issue*

#5 of ***Superman Adventures*** *features the return of Livewire (a character that hasn't shown up on the show yet, but that's yet another matter...) in a story that combines action, adventure, and a bit of a message. That has always been one of McCloud's strengths: he has the ability to mix a childlike demeanor into serious issues without losing any quality. That isn't as easy as it might sound.*

In fact, I find the powerful message he packs into this story to be the charm of the issue—and it's not necessarily what happens to Livewire that makes that message work, but the responses of the other women in the story.

The new art team for the book is Brett Blevins and Terry Austin. This isn't the team that people would picture when trying to visualize an animated style, but they work surprisingly well. Blevins has always had a bit of a cartoony style that works in an animated book, and Austin cleans him up so that the look is dead on for the title.

Oh, I think that they deserve more credit than that; had it not been for the subtle expressions they were able to work into their renditions of some of the women observing this fight, the story would have been much less successful. They've done a good job of combining the over-the-top animation style with the expressiveness of more traditional art.

Superman Adventures #5 *is the heralding of the new age for this title. Gladly, it is a promising future for a very promising book.*

Superman Adventures #5
Cliff ★★★
Brett ★★★

Marvel fans should pick up ***Jack Kirby's Fourth World #1.***

Um, Cliff, that's a DC title, remember? What are you thinking?

I have my reaons.. but it's tough when you can't give those reasons for a recommendation like that—or at least, *all* the reasons for a recommendation like that. Believe me, though: there are some surprises here that you're going to love. While Byrne isn't using Marvel characters, he's managed to...

Wait a second, do want to tell them about ***that?***

Oh, I want to—but I'm not going to do it...

I will say, though, that ***Jack Kirby's Fourth World #1,*** John Byrne's series that picks up where *New Gods* left off, is a book that truly lives up to the promise of the first two words in the title. Byrne is paying homage to Kirby in virtually ever panel of this book—not by slavishly aping him and artographing old panels as more than one contemporary pro has done, but by recreating the bold layouts, the dynamic figures, and the grand look and feel of classic Kirby.

You really should mention that this is a perfect place for new readers to get started in the title. This is the first time that I can recall the entire background of the New Gods being laid out so that you understand who these characters are and how they inter-relate. The whole background and history of the series is in this one title, along with a few new twists like the introduction of...

Oops, I almost spilled the beans.

And boy, would that have stirred up a storm of controversy...

As Brett said, all the Kirby Fourth World heroes are here, in a series written and illustrated by a man who obviously enjoyed those original series as much as I did. I'm having a great time with this book, and anyone who enjoys superheroes-as-mythology is sure to do the same.

There, I did it: the review's over, and the secret of the last page is safe!... *whew*

Jack Kirby's Fourth World #1
Cliff ★★★★
Brett ★★★

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